return to HW - Kissinger file

ITT's View of Chile: How Accurate the Picture?

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SANTIAGO, March 22 — The Anderson documents that have the greatest impact on U.S. relations abroad, talking of a "green light" from President Nixon for a coup in Chile, are drawn from obscure and questionable sources.

While the documents that Jack Anderson says were obtained from the Washington ITT office show in astonishing detail just whom the company officials were buttonholing in the United States, this is not the case in the equally sensational messages from two ITT officials in Latin America.

The messages not only talk of active U.S. intervention, but make embarrassing assessments of former President Eduardo Frei and his relations with then-Ambassador Edward Korry.

These tidbits have provoked intensive press coverage here. Socialist President Salvador Allende, the target of the alleged coup attempt, has remained silent and ordered his government to do likewise.

Distinction Among Documents

The distinction between the documents said to originate in the United States and those that were sent there from Latin America is an important one.

Two former newsmen employed by ITT as public relations officials for the company's Latin American operations have been revealed as authors of the dispatches from the field.

The two are Robert Berrellez, long-time Associated Press reporter in Latin America now based in Buenos Aires for ITT, and Hal Hendrix, former Scripps-Howard reporter in the area which he now covers out of New York-Miami for ITT.

Berrellez is known among foreign correspondents in Latin America for having held highly conservative opinions about Latin American politics without having let these views show in his AP copy. Hendrix gained some fame for his insistent reporting of what he alleged was a Communist threat in the Dominican Republic in 1964 prior to the U.S. Intervention there.

Statements in Messages

Anderson's documents include these statements laid to Berrellez and Hendrix, with the attribution to one ore the other blurred. The date is Sept. 17, 1970, 13 days after the popular vote victory of Allende:

- Ambassador Korry "finally received (Sept. 15) a message from the State Department in which he was given the green light to take action in the name of President Nixon" to prevent Allende from taking office. Korry was said to have "maximum authority to do all possible, short of a Dominican Republic-type action."
- The key figure was Frei, the question was how much pressure could be exerted on him. "Korry has never let up on Frei, to the point of telling him how to 'put his pants on,'" the same message said.

None of the documents reveals the writers' sources of this information, though the indiscretion of the views themselves indicates that the authors had no compunction about protecting a source.

Berrellez has said in Buenos Aires that he would not discuss the story beyond denying its authenticity. Hendrix was not available. But some assessment of possible sources can be made here in retrospect.

'In, Out of Embassy'

Hendrix and especially Berrellez visited often in Santiago during the electoral period of late 1970, as did a large number of U.S. newsmen. One of the prime sources of news and opinion, in individual and collective "backgrounders," was Korry, himself a former UPI reporter.

The ITT men did not attend these sessions, but they, too, were, in the words of an official, "in and out of the embassy."

It is possible, but unprovable, that Korry or some equally informed official, revealed to the ITT men what was never hinted at among newsmen. But by my personal account and those of other newsmen present, Korry never alluded to anything like the two colorful quotes' content.

On the other hand, such stories were rife in the rumor mills of Santiago's then-desperate right wing.

No Reply From Frei

As for the matter of Korry telling Frei how to put his pants on, I read this quote to the former President, who has gained considerable respect in Latin America.

Frei had no reply for publication, just as he refused to respond a couple months ago when a writer accused him—without citing sources—of taking part in a machination against Allende.

However, on request, members of Frei's staff searched the records and

declared today that throughout the September-October period in question, Frei did not once see Korry.

My personal recollection is that Korry was seeing no one, so as to head off allegations so frequently heard here that the Americans were meddling in the election.

This does not preclude phone conversations, but Korry denied at the time having talked to any political figures. Korry5s alleged characterization of the Chilean army as "a bunch of toy soldiers" is the sort of remark he was inclined to make in the security of non-attribution, but he was not known to reveal matters of state. Far from it.

One of the rare messages in which Berrellez or Hendrix do cite a source in the Washington documents is an extensive interview with a well-known conservative Chilean politician, whose forebodings of doom under Allende jibe with the overall tenor of the ITT men's own assessments.

No Focus on CIA

The material originating in Latin America does not focus on conversations with the CIA, although it does talk of promised aid to plotter Gen. Roberto Viaux. "It is a fact," say the reporters, without saying how so.

The fliptone of the opinions makes it clear that the ITT men had little or no fear of their message being read outside their channel to ITT's vice president in New York for public relations, E. J. Gerrity.

That channel seems to have nomally been Berrellez-to-Hendrix-to-Gerrity. Yesterday, before the names of the two men had been revealed, the government manager of the now-nationalized ITT phone subsidiary here declared that records show an unusual amount of ITT-originated traffic from Santiago to Rio de Janeiro and to San Juan, Puerto Rico.

The Rio connection is unclear, but Hendrix was spending much time in San Juan, where ITT interests are extensive, and apparently second-handing Berrellez's reports from here, or from Buenos Aires, to ITT in New York.

Allusions to Plots

This comment by the government manager also shows simplicity, that Chile's present government has not found a means to learn the content of ITT's private international traffic.

Indeed, though from their first days in office Allende and his most trusted cabinet members have alluded to plots of the CIA, the Chilean right wing and the foreign companies—and these allusions continue — few facts have appeared. The most notable of these few connected with the conviction of Viaux and others for taking park in the killing of the Chilean army commander just at the time of Allende's election by Congress.

The chief of investigations for the Interior Ministry showed great interest in the content of the Anderson papers, but said that he himself had nothing to add to them.

Until Allende decides how to react to the most recent revelations, it will be difficult to measure the probable damage to American-Chilean relations.

Almost certainly ITT's hopes for a high compensation for its nationalized phone company are lessened, and the future of the company's other properties here has been jeopardized.

And the zippy copy of a former newsman, revealed where is was not intended to be, will be a bitter burden for former President Frei to carry in Chile's hard-played politics.